

Corporate Parenting Board

22 September 2016

Report title	Adoption Agency Report 2015/2016	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Families	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Linda Sanders, People	
Originating service	Children and Young People	
Accountable employee(s)	Shirley Gounder	Senior Social Work Manager
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Report to be/has been considered by	The report has not been considered at any other meetings	

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive, observe and provide feedback on the Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service Interim Report.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report details the work of City of Wolverhampton Council Adoption Service in the year March 2015 to April 2016. The purpose of the report is to provide updated information in relation to adoption locally and nationally.

2.0 Background

2.1 Adoption Reform Agenda

- 2.1.1 The Adoption Reform Agenda has been on-going since the latter part of 2011, and as well as the introduction of new legislation four papers have been released.
- 2.1.2 An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay, March 2012; Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes, January 2013 and Regionalising Adoption, June 2015. Adoption: A Vision for Change, March 2016
- 2.1.3 The Adoption Leadership Board was launched in April 2014:
- 2.1.4 The Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) is a national board with a remit to drive significant improvements in the performance of the adoption system in England.
- 2.1.5 Regionalising Adoption, June 2015:
- 2.1.6 Regionalising Adoption is the most recent Department for Education (DfE) paper and outlines the Government's plans to reduce the number of adoption agencies across England. It is argued that fewer adoption agencies would achieve more economies of scale and would allow quicker matching for children. It is anticipated that local authorities will have a wider pool of adopters who could potentially meet the needs of a child for whom they were considering adoption.
- 2.1.7 Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell, Telford and Wrekin, Shropshire and Adoption Focus (a voluntary adoption agency) submitted a regionalisation proposal to access funds with the purpose of developing a single sub-regional adoption service. The group have been successful in securing £56,000 in 2015/16 and £154,000 in 2016/17 from the Department of Education (DfE) to scope the best possible means of delivering a single adoption service in line with the regionalising adoption agenda.
- 2.1.8 Adoption UK and After Adoption have joined the partnership to create Adoption @heart.
- 2.1.9 It is anticipated that any new model will build on the existing Adoption in the Black Country (ABC) and Adoption Focus model. Recruitment and assessment, family finding and adoption support are the three main areas that are likely to be delivered through a regional adoption service.

2.2 Panel Business

2.2.1 Below are the number of adopters approved and the number of children matched with prospective adopters between April 2015 and March 2016.

Approval of Prospective adopters	Matches of children with prospective adopters
20	39

2.3 Adopter approval

2.3.1 There have been 20 approvals of prospective adopters in the reporting period.

2.3.2 ABC and AF agencies continue to experience a growth in enquiries and subsequent referrals. In this period ABC and AF held 33 information events which means that prospective adopters on average waited no longer than 11 days to attend an event.

2.3.3 45 initial assessments were completed, 24 prospective Adopter reports were completed and 20 adopters were approved. 22 were mainstream adopters and 2 were inter-country adopters.

2.3.4 There are five Asian families currently waiting. One couple have had a child placed under foster for adoption arrangements. Two other families have very precise matching criteria and Wolverhampton have not yet been able to identify a match. Family finding has been active on their behalf and they have been advised to attend National Exchange Days. They have also been featured on Adoption Links which is a national adoption data base, the National Adoption Register and Adopt West Mids.

2.4 Links of children with prospective adopters

2.4.1 During the reporting period April 2015 to March 2016, 39 children were matched with prospective adopters.

2.4.2 12 of the 39 children matched at panel were part of a sibling group.

2.4.3 When considering the ethnicity of the children matched, six of the 39 children were of black and minority ethnic (BAME) background.

2.4.4 Of the 39 children matched 10 were over three, with seven of these being boys over the age of five.

2.4.5 The A2 indicator measures the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. The current target is four months.

- 2.4.6 100% of children who have become subject to a placement order in this reporting year have been matched within four months.
- 2.4.7 The adoption service is committed to increasing the number of foster for adoption/concurrency placements; during this reporting period five placements have been approved.
- 2.4.8 There has been one adoption disruption in this reporting period. This is the first in three years, and Wolverhampton remains well below average with regards to adoption disruptions.
- 2.4.9 20 of the children matched were placed with adopters approved by Wolverhampton; the remainder were placed with adopters approved by other local authorities or voluntary agencies.

2.5 Children's decisions

- 2.5.1 During this reporting period 52 children have had a decision of "Should be Placed for Adoption" (SBPFA) decisions made. There is a dip in the number of Children for Whom Wolverhampton is pursuing a plan of adoption. It is however to be acknowledged that the number of children for whom SBPFA decisions were made in 2014/2015 were unusually high.
- 2.5.2 50 placement orders were granted in 2015/2016. 19 were for females and 31 for males.
- 2.5.3 As outlined in a previous Annual Adoption Report, in 2014 a judgement was passed by Mr Justice Munby (President of the Family Division of the High Court of England and Wales) that significantly changed the adoption landscape across the country. Re B (June 2013) and B-S (Sept 2013) challenged the robust nature of adoption plans and decision making both in relation to social work reports and court judgments. As a direct result local authorities began to see the numbers of placement order being granted decreasing and by November 2014 it was reported that nationally placement orders had decreased by 54%.
- 2.5.4 Of the 50 children 35 children were White British, seven were Black British Caribbean, five were dual heritage, White British Black Caribbean or dual heritage, White British Asian and four were White Other.
- 2.5.5 In terms of age 32 children were aged 0-2, 14 children were aged 3-5 and four children were 6 or above.

3.0 Strategic issues and forward plans

- 3.1.1 Wolverhampton remains committed to adoption as a positive permanence choice for children who cannot be cared for by their birth relatives. The service has welcomed the governments challenge around timeliness for children who have a plan of adoption, it is well accepted that age at placement is one predictor impacting on positive outcomes for

children who are placed for adoption. Wolverhampton is therefore committed to continuing to improve timeliness for children.

- 3.1.2 A key feature of the Adoption Service improvement plan is to increase the recruitment of adopters who can consider offering early permanence options to children either through concurrent planning or foster to adopt. This has been echoed by the government who have set a soft target of doubling such placements during 2016/2017.
- 3.1.3 The Adoption Service has demonstrated the ability to embrace new ways of working in order to improve outcomes for children. It is expected that closer working within the region as described above will lend itself to ensuring that children are matched without delay with adopters who are able to meet their long term needs.
- 3.1.4 As the regionalising agenda is progressed it will be important to ensure that the team continues to build on previous success. This will include further improving timeliness, recruiting more adopters who will consider concurrency and foster to adopt and remaining ambitious for harder to place children to ensure they are offered the opportunities they deserve.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The approved budget for 2015/16 for the Adoption Service was £2.8 million.
- 4.2 The government has made funds available that will allow the local authority to claim back the inter-agency fee when placements are made for harder to place children. Eligibility criteria includes children who have been waiting for 18 months or more since coming into care at the time of placement, who are aged five or over at the time of placement, who are in a sibling group of two or more and placed as siblings at the time of placement, children who are from a BAME background and children who are disabled.
- 4.3 Wolverhampton has placed over 50% of children through inter agency placements for a number of years. The fund however, has allowed the City of Wolverhampton Council to continue to make these placements in financially challenging times. During 2015/2016 Wolverhampton has claimed reimbursement of £184,000 for the interagency fee grant. The Government has recently informed Local Authorities that the grant will continue until October 2016.
NN/12092016/0

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The Education and Adoption Act 2016 amends functions outlined in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 requiring local authorities to make arrangements for their adoption functions (recruitment, assessment and approval) to be carried out, which can include functions being carried out by another adoption agency.
TC/13092016/U

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 Wolverhampton seeks to recruit and purchase adopters who are able to meet the needs of a diverse range of children.
This includes children of different black and minority ethnic groups, both young and older children, male and female children. This is reflected within the recruitment strategy and all new policies have been subject to an equalities analysis.

7.0 Environmental implications

- 7.1 There are no environmental implications

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 Regionalisation will have human resources implications but the extent of these is not known at present. Human resources will be considered as part of the scoping exercise.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 9.1 There are no corporate landlord implications.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

The Annual Adoption Report March 2015 - March 2016 is attached.

11. Appendix 1 - Comments from the Children in Care Council

- 11.1 The report was accepted by the CICC on 07/09/16 and they asked the following questions

The CICC were asked how many adoptions have the City of Wolverhampton undertaken during the last year; one young person suggested 50 while another suggested 38. The CICC were asked how many disruptions they thought occurred during the year and gave answers such as '30%' and 'loads'. The answers were given during the discussion of the annual adoption report.

1. A question was asked if there was an age range for adoption. One young person said she was 5 when she entered care and was told at 5 years old, she was too old as the cut off was 4 years. It was explained that previously the view was held by some professionals that children aged 5 may not be able to be adopted.

It was explained that the City of Wolverhampton have an ambitious view that children up to 10 or beyond depending on circumstances can be considered for adoption. One care leaver who sits on the Adoption panel gave an example of a child aged 8 being approved for adoption.

2. Does panel decide who gets adopted and who stays in foster care?

The panel and decision making process was explained.

3. Has life story training helped adopters to understand the background history of the children?

It was confirmed it has.

Discussions were had around social media and one young person gave examples of their mother being on Facebook and how this had been problematic.

4. Is there anything in place when social media is accessed i.e. to have life story work in place and adopted children are aware of their background before they are contacted by parents via social media for example so information does not come as a shock from parents? I.e. parents may be 'sour' about their adoption and this could be a problem. Thanked the young people for this good point made.

A care leaver who sits on fostering panel gave a comment that being on panel has opened her eyes at how in-depth the assessment process is.

5. What happens if there is an adoption breakdown? What support is in place?
Examples shared about working with CIN/CP social workers and adoption support provision
6. Can you use TV adverts to recruit adopters? Newspapers are ok but TV would be better but then not everyone accesses media in this way so need to be creative i.e. radio broadcasts. Marketing examples were explained and the CICC were directed to page 19 in the annual report which outlined an innovative marketing campaign targeting adopters in recruiting siblings.

7. What happens to sibling contact if not placed together? Discussion had around together and apart sibling assessments and contact.
8. Can letterbox contact be resumed if stopped? Details taken. Discussion had around use of email and Skype rather than letterbox. Two young people shared how contact had ceased with siblings. Discussions took place individually following the session with the promise that the adoption team would explore contact arrangements and contact the young people/foster carer with the outcome.